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SUBJECT: RWANDA: FRENCH REACTION TO GENOCIDE ACCUSATIONS

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kathleen Allegrone, 1.4 (b/d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Acting MFA Rwanda desk officer Claude Blevin said on August 14 that France was waiting to see if Rwanda would act on the recent Rwandan report accusing France of involvement in the 1994 genocide. He said the report was politically motivated and an attempt by Rwanda to have France rescind the November 2006 report by former Judge Bruguiere that led to international warrants against high-ranking Rwandans and recommended that President Kagame be considered for prosecution in connection with the genocide. Blevin said that the accusations contained in the Rwandan report were false and that, although France may have made mistakes at the time of the genocide, in no way was it complicit. The French remain interested in improving relations, but improvement will be difficult unless the Rwandans change their attitude towards France. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Acting MFA Rwanda desk officer Claude Blevin on August 14 discussed the recent Rwandan report that accused France of involvement in the 1994 Rwandan genocide, naming a number of prominent French leaders for their alleged roles. Blevin questioned the impartiality of the report, noting that although the commission that produced it was called "independent," it was charged with finding evidence of French involvement in the genocide. He said the French were not given an advance copy of the report, which they would have appreciated.

A "Political" Report

¶3. (C) Blevin said that he and other GOF officials considered the report a direct response to former anti-terrorism Judge Bruguiere's November 2006 report that caused Rwanda to break relations with France, that formed the basis of international arrest warrants against leading Rwandans, and that recommended that the ICTR consider prosecuting President Kagame. In that sense, the Rwandan report was a "political" text designed to push the French into rescinding Bruguiere's report and removing the threat of indictment, which the individuals involved found increasingly irritating as time passed. Blevin said the Rwandan report was ready to be issued in November 2007 but that the Rwandans held off, hoping that the French would quash the Bruguiere Report.

¶4. (C) Blevin said the French had explained on many occasions that France's judges operated with a great deal of independence and that neither a French President nor any other element of the GOF could simply order a judge to stop an investigation. The Rwandans never seemed to understand this, Blevin said. He observed that their insistence suggested that Rwanda's judiciary did not enjoy such independence, which would weaken any claim of judicial independence they might later assert.

¶5. (C) As have other GOF officials, Blevin said that

Bruguiere's report was an unwelcome surprise and that there was no easy way for the GOF to work around it. It had the force and effect of law. Blevin surmised that the Rwandans eventually ceased hoping that the GOF would nullify Bruguiere's report without further "encouragement" and thus released their report as a means of increasing the pressure. They still did not seem to understand, Blevin stressed, the virtually absolute independence French judges enjoyed.

Connection with ICC and Bashir?

¶6. (C) Blevin noted that the Rwandans' timing may have been influenced by the recent move by the ICC prosecutor to seek indictment of Sudanese President Bashir. Kagame had been critical of the ICC, its possible prosecution of Bashir, and what he believed to be the ICC's penchant for going after only Third World and not Western figures. Issuance of the Rwandan report was thus a riposte intended to serve the West a dose of its own medicine.

The Rwandan Accusations

¶7. (C) On the Rwandan accusations of French involvement in the genocide, Blevin said that the 1998 report by a National Assembly commission headed by Deputy Paul Quiles remained the most authoritative French overview of the incident. (NOTE: The Quiles Report is available at: www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dossiers/rwanda/rapport.asp. END NOTE.) Blevin said that the Quiles Report identified several French "errors of appreciation" of the complex and fluid situation in Rwanda before and during the genocide but that there was no evidence of any French culpability in the

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genocide itself. Blevin added that, "as in many other conflicts, there always could have been excesses on the part of individual soldiers -- and I'm not conceding that there were any -- but to suggest that the French government was directly involved or intended the genocide to take place is completely ridiculous."

Ball in Rwanda's Court

¶8. (C) Blevin said the next move was up to Rwanda. Their report was closer to the 1998 Quiles Report than it was to the 2006 Bruguiere Report in that the Rwandan report was not self-executing in the way the Bruguiere Report was (i.e., it did not itself operate as a warrant or indictment). Thus, the French would wait to see if the Rwandans took the step of using their report as the basis of formal legal action against France or those the report accused of complicity in the genocide. "We'll wait to see what they do. If they go forward, we may have to fight this out in court. The first thing we'd probably do is request the names of the alleged witnesses named in the report so that we can investigate their claims. As the witnesses are not identified in the Rwandan report, an investigation might show that some or all of the testimony was fabricated or exaggerated. We'll need to find out."

France Still Seeking to Improve Relations

¶9. (C) Although the Rwandan report made the task much more difficult, Blevin said that France was still hoping to improve relations and to avoid allowing the 1994 genocide to interfere with progress that would be to the benefit of both sides. He noted that FM Kouchner had visited Rwanda earlier in 2008, that the two sides had met a few times in a working-group format, and that the French continued to try to maintain dialogue. But the Rwandans had not been forthcoming and the issuance of their report suggested they preferred playing hard-ball rather than seeking reconciliation.

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